

Why Buy Recycled?

Until materials are made into new, recycled-content products (RCP) and purchased by consumers, they are not really recycled.

Recycling won’t work unless purchasing RCPs becomes the norm. Returning your beverage containers, newspapers, and other recyclable materials is only the first step in the recycling process. Take the next step by purchasing products made from those diverted and recovered materials. When you purchase RCPs, you help create expanded markets for recycled materials, making the collection and processing of the recovered materials economical and stabilizing the entire recycling process.

As the demand goes up, the variety and quality of available RCPs goes up and the prices come down. RCPs have the same high quality as goods made from virgin materials—sometimes even higher. When you buy recycled, you help “close the loop” to complete the recycling process.

**Buying RCPs creates markets** for recyclables and strengthens existing ones.

**Buying RCPs creates jobs.** Manufacturing new products from recovered and diverted materials creates far more jobs than landfilling or incinerating those valuable materials.

**Buying RCPs increases investments** in the recycling industry infrastructure.

**Buying RCPs conserves landfill space** and prolongs the useful life of the recycled materials.

**Buying RCPs conserves natural resources** and reduces energy consumption, pollution, and waste in the manufacturing process.

**Buying RCPs attains procurement mandates and goals.** All State and local government departments, boards, commissions, and offices in California are required to buy RCPs, and many corporations and other private organizations have environmentally preferable purchasing policies.

Cover photograph:  
Pedestrian bridge over the American River above Sunrise Boulevard, Sacramento, California. The bridge was refurbished with 50 percent postconsumer content plastic decking.

Finding Recycled-Content Products

The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) created the Recycled-Content Product Database to establish a comprehensive listing of RCPs to provide one-stop shopping for consumers. This database contains more than 8,000 listings of RCPs available from more than 2,000 suppliers.

You can search the database by product/brand name, company, or key word. You can print the results of your searches, or you can follow a link directly to the supplier’s Web site. Access the database at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RCP/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RCP/).

How to Buy Recycled

- Look for labels identifying recycled content. Suppliers should identify recycled content on product packaging, in product literature, or on the products themselves.
- Look for postconsumer content. A product may be identified as a recycled product but may not contain any postconsumer material. Postconsumer material comes from products that have already been used and then put out to be recycled—the material you have recycled!
- Be wary of terms such as “recyclable,” “environmentally friendly,” “eco-safe,” “safe for the environment,” or “natural.” They can mean anything a supplier wants them to mean and do not necessarily indicate that the product contains recycled material—or even that it is an environmentally preferable product.
- Talk to suppliers and ask that they begin manufacturing or supplying recycled products with high levels of postconsumer content. Ask them to identify recycled content on product labeling.
- Encourage others in your office, school, business, and community to buy recycled products.
- Attend RCP trade shows, such as the CIWMB’s annual Recycled Product Trade Show. See the CIWMB’s Buy Recycled Events Calendar at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/Events/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/Events/).

*You’re not really recycling...  
unless you’re buying recycled.*

Cost Comparison

Many RCPs—such as janitorial paper products, corrugated packaging, padded mailers, latex paint, compost, mulch, writing tablets, remanufactured toner cartridges, and many others—cost the same as or less than their non-recycled counterparts.

Some RCPs—particularly durable plastic and rubber products like plastic lumber and rubberized asphalt—have an initial cost that may be higher than comparable non-RCPs. However, when looking at the cost of the products over their entire lives, these RCPs often turn out to be less expensive. When cost comparisons include repair, maintenance, labor, replacement, and other costs, the total cost of durable RCPs will probably be less than similar non-RCPs.

Products Available

**This is a small sample of products made with postconsumer material:**

For Offices

Binders, business cards, computer paper, copier paper, corrugated paperboard, computer disks, toner cartridges, stacking letter trays, white office paper, writing pads, envelopes, folders, calendars, padded mailers, labels, adhesive notes, and mailing tubes.

For Maintenance, Construction, and Landscaping

Acoustical ceiling tiles, asphalt, concrete, bathroom and kitchen tile, building insulation, wallboard, carpet, carpet pads, mats, compost, mulch, dock bumpers, flooring, countertops, motor oil, antifreeze, paint, pallets, parking stops, plastic lumber for benches, picnic tables, decks, fences, posts, and marine piers; playground mats, rain gutters, recycling bins, retreaded tires, roadbase, rubberized asphalt, bathroom partitions, and speed bumps.

For Janitorial Services

Plastic trash bags, toilet paper, paper towels, and tissue.

State Agency Buy Recycled Campaign (SABRC)

State, federal, and local governments have laws requiring RCP procurement. Many corporations and other private organizations have RCP procurement policies as well.

Government purchasing can help develop markets for recyclable materials. As the single largest purchasing entity in California, State government can have a major impact on RCP supply and demand.

California law requires State and local government agencies to purchase recycled products. State agencies are mandated to ensure that at least 50 percent of the dollars spent on products within 11 product categories, and 25 percent of the dollars spent on products in a twelfth category, are spent on RCPs. Furthermore, State agencies must submit annual reports to document compliance with the RCP-procurement mandates of the SABRC.

Finally, product suppliers are required to certify the recycled content—both secondary and postconsumer material—of all products offered or sold to the State. (Secondary material consists of fragments of finished products of a manufacturing process. This material is recycled prior to reaching consumers.)

In RCP purchasing, State agencies must take the lead and set an example for other government agencies and the private sector. If the private sector believes that the State is committed to buying RCPs, it will respond by manufacturing more of them, and by increasing its own RCP purchases. In this way, the State and the private sector create a synergy that will build and sustain markets for recyclable materials.

For more information about the SABRC, visit the CIWMB’s Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/StateAgency/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/StateAgency/).

*Buy recycled . . .  
it’s good business.*

**Contract Language**

All bid and contract documents should include language identifying a preference for RCPs. Contract documents should also contain the Recycled-Content Certification Form for use by product suppliers to identify the recycled content of their products. Specifications that impede the purchase of RCPs should be deleted and replaced with performance standards. All specifications should be established with the goal of purchasing the maximum amount of RCPs possible.

Specify recycled paper containing at least 30 percent postconsumer fiber for all print jobs.

Specify that new equipment be compatible with recycled-content supplies and materials—this applies to leased or rented equipment too.

Specify the procurement/supply of lower cost RCPs, such as those listed above.

*One good purchase...  
deserves another.*

**Other Related CIWMB Programs:  
Green Building**

Sustainable design or building “green” is an opportunity to use our resources efficiently while creating healthier buildings. It provides cost savings to all Californians through improved human health and productivity, lower building operations costs, and resource efficiency—and it moves us closer to a sustainable future. Access the Green Building Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/GreenBuilding/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/GreenBuilding/).

**Recycling Market Development Zones (RMDZ)**

The RMDZ program is a partnership of local governments and the CIWMB in 40 zones across California. The program provides incentives to businesses that use postconsumer and/or secondary materials from the waste stream as feedstock for their manufacturing processes. Access the RMDZ Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RMDZ/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RMDZ/).

**RecycleStore**

The RecycleStore showcases innovative RCPs and puts you directly in touch with their manufacturers. Whether you are a wholesale buyer or an individual consumer, use this catalog to discover a variety of quality RCPs designed with your needs in mind. All products in the RecycleStore are manufactured by companies located in California’s RMDZs. Visit the RecycleStore at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RecycleStore/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/RecycleStore/).

**California Materials Exchange (CalMAX)**

CalMAX is a free service designed to help businesses find markets for nonhazardous materials they have traditionally discarded. CalMAX helps businesses, industries, and institutions save resources and money. Access the CalMAX Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/CalMAX/).

**Waste Prevention Information Exchange (WPIE)**

The WPIE is an interactive directory of informational resources on waste prevention. Access the WPIE at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WPIE/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/WPIE/).

**Publications**

Our searchable publications database contains more than 500 publications produced by the CIWMB, most of which are available electronically. Please direct any comments or suggestions to the Publications Manager at [pubs@ciwmb.ca.gov](mailto:pubs@ciwmb.ca.gov) or (916) 341-6306. Access the Publications Web site at [www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/).

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Visit our Web site at  
[www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/](http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BuyRecycled/).

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*take the next step*

**Buy  
Recycled**

A GUIDE TO BUYING  
RECYCLED-CONTENT PRODUCTS

